AN ENTERTAINING COMIC
NO. 36
MAY
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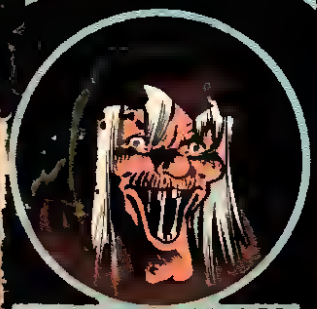
THE VAULT OF HORROR®

HORROR

FEATURING...



THE VAULT-KEEPER

THE CRYPT-KEEPER

THE OLD WITCH

JOHNNY CRAIG

I WAS *UPLIFTED* FROM THE *DEPTHS OF DESPAIR* BY THIS *REVEALING EXPERIENCE!* I *LAUGHED SO NARD* I ALMOST *BUST* THE *BINDING!* I WAS THE *CENTER* OF *ATTRACTION*... THE *STAR.* EVERYBODY WANTED TO *DANCE* WITH ME! I WAS *RUSHED!* SO *BE POPULAR* LIKE *ME!* WEAR *PANIC!* RUN DOWN AND GET *INTO* YOUR COPY AT YOUR *LOCAL NEWSSTAND.* IF YOU'RE THE *SHY TYPE* AND WOULD RATHER *DRESS AT HOME,* THEN YOU CAN *SUBSCRIBE* BY FILLING OUT THIS COUPON AND MAILING TO:

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Ontology

THE VAULT OF HORROR!

HEH, HEH! WELL, HERE I AM AGAIN, KIDDIES, WITH ANOTHER REVOLTING YARN REEKING WITH *FEAR*, OOZING WITH *SUSPENSE*, CRAMMED WITH *TENSION*, OVERFLOWING WITH *MOOD, ATMOSPHERE* AND SHEER *TERROR!* YES, HERE IS A TALE THAT SEEMS TO HAVE *EVERYTHING!* SO PULL UP A *CRUD-COVERED GRAVESTONE* AND I'LL TELL YOU THE EXCITING STORY FROM THE *VAULT*, CALLED..

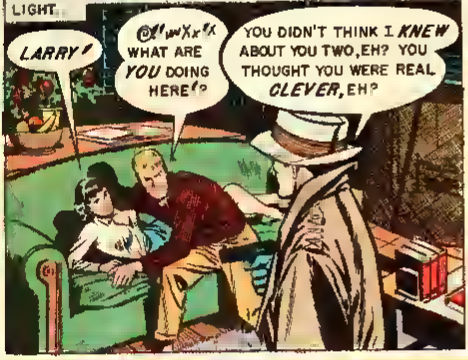
TWIN BILL!

LARRY BANNISTER PRESSED BACK DEEPER INTO THE CORNER UNTIL THE WALL-BEAM CUT INTO HIS SPINE. HE SWIPED WITH HIS COAT-SLEEVE AT THE PERSPIRATION RUNNING DOWN INTO HIS EYES, TIGHTENED HIS GRIP ON THE COLT .38! HIS HANDS WERE SLIMEY-WET INSIDE HIS GLOVES, HIS LIPS FELT SWOLLEN AND PARCHED TO HIS FLICKING TONGUE. THIS WAS IT! ONLY A FEW MORE MINUTES AND IT WOULD BE ALL OVER! WHERE WERE THEY? WHY DID THEY TAKE SO LONG?

HE WAITED, SURROUNDED BY THE SILENCE, THE DARKNESS AND HE REMEMBERED HOW HE HAD PEERED INTO THIS VERY ROOM TWO AGES-LONG WEEKS AGO, WATCHING A MAN AND WOMAN IN THE THROES OF PASSION, SWEARING THEIR UNDYING LOVE. AND THE WOMAN WAS HIS *WIFE!*

HE REMEMBERED HOW CAREFULLY SHE HAD TRIED TO HIDE THE FACT THAT SHE HAD A LOVER, BUT HE HADN'T BEEN FOOLED! SHARON HADN'T BEEN CLEVER ENOUGH! AND AS HE HAD LISTENED TO THEIR WARM, MELTING MURMURINGS, HE CHUCKLED VICIOUSLY, FINGERING THE TRIGGER OF HIS AUTOMATIC...

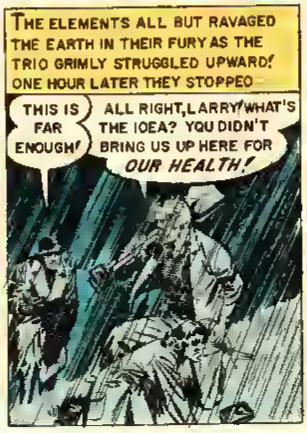
SHE THOUGHT HE HAD LEFT ON A BUSINESS TRIP AND, AS AN ALIBI FOR HIM, IT WAS PERFECT! HE REMEMBERED THE FRIGHTENED, GUILTY FACES STARING AT HIM IN THE DIM LIGHT...



A GUN COULD SPEAK A STRONG LANGUAGE AND THEY HAD KNOWN IT! QUIETLY, ALMOST DEFIANTLY, THEY HAD OBEYED HIS EVERY ORDER, GATHERING ALL HIS WIFE'S PERSONAL BELONGINGS... ANYTHING THAT WOULD LEAVE A TRACE.

HE REMEMBERED THE QUESTIONING GLANCE THAT HAD PASSED BETWEEN THEM. THEIR SILENT DETERMINATION NOT TO SHOW HIM THEIR FEAR...

THE ELEMENTS ALL BUT RAVAGED THE EARTH IN THEIR FURY AS THE TRIO GRIMLY STRUGGLED UPWARD! ONE HOUR LATER THEY STOPPED



AS THE HOURS CRAWLED BY, THE SHOVELS SUNK DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE SODDEN EARTH, AND IN THE FLASHES OF LIGHTNING, THE TWO LOVERS LASORED HEAVILY...

ALL RIGHT! THAT'S ENOUGH! THAT'S PLENTY DEEP ENOUGH!

LISTEN HERE, LARRY! I KNOW YOU'RE SORE.. ABOUT SHARON AN' ME! BUT WE *LOVE* EACH OTHER!

HE REMEMBERED HOW THEY HAD TALKED, TRYING SO DESPERATELY TO MAINTAIN THEIR BRAVERY...

YOU AND I WERE NEVER IN *LOVE*, LARRY! AND IF YOU HAD GIVEN ME THE *DIVORCE* I WANTED, *NONE* OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED! WE WANT TO BE *TOGETHER*, THAT'S ALL!

SURE! SHARON AND I WERE *MEANT* TO BE *TOGETHER!* YOU CAN'T KEEP US APART, SO WHAT'S THE *POINT* TO ALL THIS?!

DON'T ACT *DUMB!* YOU KNOW WHAT THE SCORE IS, JUST AS I DO! I'M *GOING* TO LET YOU BE *TOGETHER...IN THE GRAVE YOU JUST FINISHED DIGGING!*

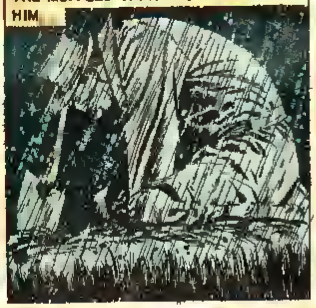
WHY, YOU CRAZY *THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK!*

HE HAD WATCHED HIS WIFE'S LOVER FALL BACK, SPRAWL AWKWARDLY IN THE PIT. SHARON FELL TO HIS SIDE, CRYING NOW, PLEADING FOR HIM TO WAKE UP. AND HE RECALLED HOW HE HAD SHOVED THE GUN IN HIS COAT POCKET, HOW HE HAD SNATCHED UP THE SHOVEL AND BEGUN HEAPING THE DIRT ON TOP OF THE TWO BODIES...

HE REMEMBERED THAT SHE HADN'T EVER *TRIED* TO ESCAPE! SHE HAD REMAINED MOTIONLESS, HER ARMS AROUND HER LOVER, CRYING HOPELESSLY- HADN'T EVEN *TRIED* TO ESCAPE!

MEANT FOR EACH OTHER, EH?! *YOU'LL BE TOGETHER- FOREVER!* YOU HEAR? I SAID *FOREVER!*

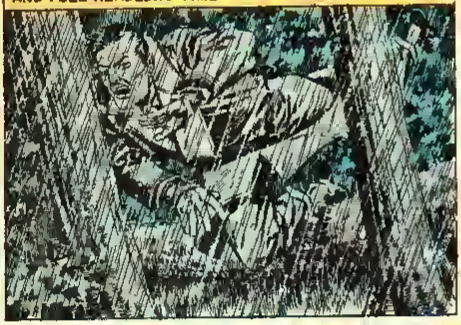
WHEN HIS TOWERING RAGE HAD SUBSIDED, HE HAD SLUMPED TO HIS KNEES ON THE MOUND, HIS HANDS PRESSED DEEPLY IN THE MOIST, BLACK DIRT. HE SHUT HIS EYES, TRIED NOT TO HEAR THE MUFFLED CRIES FROM BENEATH HIM...



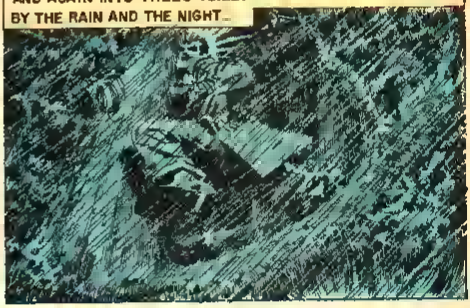
IN A WHILE, HE HAD RISEN WEARILY TO HIS FEET AND STARTED BACK TO THE LODGE. HIS WRATH HAD LEFT HIM. AND IN ITS PLACE CREPT A FEELING OF APPREHENSION.

...AND AS HE STUMBLED THROUGH THE WOODS, THERE SEEMED TO FOLLOW BEHIND HIM ON THE WIND, MOURNFUL WAILS THAT SENT CHILLS UP HIS BACK AND SPED HIM FASTER AWAY...

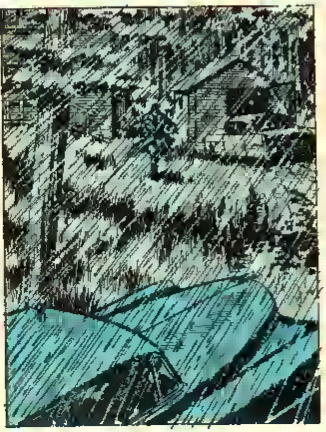
HIS APPREHENSION HAD TURNED TO FEAR, AND HIS FEAR ALMOST TO PANIC! HE BRUSHED FRANTICALLY THROUGH THE TREES, JUMPED AT EVERY SCURRYING SOUND HE HEARD ABOVE THE ANGRY THUNDER CLASHES, TRIPPED AND FELL HEADLONG TIME AFTER TIME...



HE HAD SCRABBLED DOWNWARD ALMOST BLINDLY, AND THE DENSE BLACKNESS OF THE FOREST SURROUNDED, ENVELOPED, TRIED LIKE A LIVING THING TO HALT HIS ESCAPE. THE LIGHTNING'S FURY SLASHED AT HIM, THE THUNDER CANNONADED HIS EARS, AS HE SLAMMED AGAIN AND AGAIN INTO TREES VEILED AND ALL BUT INVISIBLE BY THE RAIN AND THE NIGHT...



AND THEN HE HAD REACHED THE LODGE! AND THE CLEARING! AND WITH A CRY IN HIS THROAT HE SAW HIS CAR...THE CAR THAT WOULD TAKE HIM AWAY FROM THIS HORRIBLE MADNESS!



HE REMEMBERED HOW GRATEFULLY HE HAD CLAMBERED INTO THE CAR, SLID BEHIND THE WHEEL AND SLAMMED THE DOOR! HE REMEMBERED GULPING GREAT MOUTHFULS OF AIR, PRESSING HIS CHEST TO RELIEVE THE POUNDING PAIN, SEEING IN THE DEADLY LIGHTNING FLASHES THE HECTIC RIVERS STREAMING DOWN THE WINDSHIELD! HE FUMBLED THE KEY INTO THE IGNITION—PRESSED THE STARTER... *NOTHING!*

HE FELT THE PANIC SETTING IN AND HE STOMPED THE STARTER AGAIN AGAIN! *AGAIN! AGAIN AND AGAIN!!*

OH, GOOD GOD ... THE...THE BATTERY'S DEAD!

HE *HAD* TO GET BACK TO THE CITY! IN THE SHADOWS OF THE HUNTING LODGE HE SAW THEIR CAR! HE COULD USE *THEIR* BATTERY TO GET AWAY! HE RACED OVER, THREW UP THE HOOD...

AH! HERE IT IS!

ULP! I...I CAN'T *USE* THIS BATTERY! IT'S NOT *POWERFUL* ENOUGH!

THIS CAR HAS ONLY A *SIX-VOLT* BATTERY! AND *MY* CAR USES A *TWELVE-VOLT SYSTEM!* THIS SIX-VOLT JOB WOULDN'T BUDGE MY STARTER AN *INCH!* BUT I'VE *GOT* TO GET OUT OF HERE! *I'VE GOT TO!*

DESPERATELY, HE OPENED THE CAR DOOR AND WITH A SIGH OF RELIEF SAW THE CAR KEYS HANGING LIMPLY IN THE IGNITION SLOT. HE SLID INTO THE CAR...

THIS IS MY ONLY CHANCE! I'LL HAVE TO BRING A NEW BATTERY BACK BEFORE I CAN GET MY CAR OUT OF HERE!

HE REMEMBERED HOW HE HAD SPED SO MADLY BACK TO THE CITY AND PARKED THE CAR ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN. HE REMEMBERED PHONING THE POLICE ABOUT HIS WIFE'S DISAPPEARANCE...AND THE QUESTIONS ABOUT HER THEY ASKED. HE RECALLED HOW HE PRETENDED TO BE SO CALM, HOW HE MAINTAINED THE FRONT OF EVERYDAY BUSINESS ROUTINE, WHILE DEEP INSIDE HE WAS TORN TO SHREDS, WORRYING WHETHER HIS CAR WOULD BE DISCOVERED...

APRIL 9 APRIL 12 APRIL 13 APRIL 14 APRIL 15 APRIL 16

TWO WEEKS HAD PASSED BEFORE HE HAD A CHANCE TO RETURN TO THE LODGE! HE HAD DRIVEN BACK TONIGHT, IN THE BORROWED CAR... A BRAND NEW TWELVE-VOLT BATTERY SITTING PATIENTLY ON THE FLOOR...

TWO WEEKS! NO ONE'S FOUND MY CAR *OR* THEM! IF SOMEONE *HAD*, I CERTAINLY WOULD HAVE HEARD OF IT BY *THIS* TIME! @!!* *!!! THOUGHT THOSE MISSING PERSONS COPS WOULD *NEVER* STOP ASKING ME QUESTIONS!

HE HAD MADE GOOD TIME TONIGHT! IT HAD BEEN ONLY A LITTLE AFTER MIDNIGHT WHEN HE BRAKED THE CAR BESIDE THE LODGE AND GOT OUT! IT HAD BEEN SO... SO *QUIET!* SO DEATHLY *STILL!* SAVE FOR THE RUSTLING OF LEAVES AND AN OCCASSIONAL THREATENING GROWL OF THUNDER, HE COULDN'T HEAR A SOUND...

THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE WILLIES! I BETTER GET TO WORK ON THAT BATTERY!

IT HADN'T TAKEN LONG TO INSTALL THE NEW BATTERY IN HIS CAR, BUT THE NOISES HE MADE WHILE DOING SO SEEMED TO ECHO FOR MILES IN THE UNEARTHLY SILENCE! HE HAD WIPED THE LOVER'S CAR OF ALL HIS FINGERPRINTS, HAD MADE CERTAIN THERE WERE NO CLUES...

I'D FEEL BETTER IF I COULD HAVE GOTTEN THIS CAR OUT OF HERE TWO WEEKS AGO... BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER! I'M ALL SET NOW!

HE HAD SLIPPED QUICKLY BEHIND THE WHEEL, GLANCED FURTIVELY AROUND WHILE HIS HANDS SEARCHED THROUGH HIS POCKETS FOR THE IGNITION KEY! NERVOUSLY AT FIRST... THEN FRANTICALLY... THEN *DESPERATELY!*

NO! OH NO! HOW COULD I BE SO *STUPID!?* I *FORGOT TO BRING THE CAR KEYS!!*

BLAST IT! BLAST IT! I *CAN'T* LEAVE THE CAR HERE ANY LONGER! THERE *MUST* BE A WAY! THERE *MUST* BE

WAIT! I'VE *STILL* GOT A CHANCE! ONE LAST, LOUSY CHANCE!

SHARON HAD A SET OF CAR KEYS... KEPT THEM IN HER *PURSE!* AND *I BURIED THE PURSE WITH HER!* I HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE! *I'VE GOT TO DIG UP THOSE KEYS!*

HE HAD STARTED TO TREMBLE THEN. HE KNEW THAT AFTER TWO WEEKS, THE BODIES WOULD HAVE DECAYED. HE HADN'T LIKED THE IDEA ONE BIT!

THE SKY HAD BECOME MORE THREATENING AS HE CLIMBED LABORIOUSLY UPWARD. HE PRAYED IT WOULD NOT STORM. A CLOUDBURST LIKE THE LAST ONE WOULD SHATTER HIS COURAGE COMPLETELY! HE WAS WORKING ONLY ON SHEER NERVE *NOW!* AN ETERNITY ENDED AS HE STARED DOWN AT THE GRAVE...

GOOD LORD! IT'S EMPTY!

HE REMEMBERED HOW A MILLION HORRIBLE THOUGHTS HAD FLITTED THROUGH HIS MIND, HOW THE STENCH FROM THE YAWNING PIT CONVULSED HIS STOMACH! VAGUELY, HE RECALLED SNATCHING UP THE PURSE, STUTTERING AND MUMBLING MEANINGLESS, UNINTELLIGIBLE SOUNDS, GROPING THROUGH THE PURSE...

AH! HERE THEY ARE! I FOUND THEM!

HE HAD DROPPED THE PURSE, CLUTCHED THE KEYS TIGHTLY TO HIS CHEST. THE FIRST WAVE OF PANIC HAD PASSED...

THEY *COULDN'T* HAVE BEEN FOUND! I WOULD'VE BEEN *TOLD!* THERE'S ONLY ONE ROAD *TO* THE LODGE AND I WOULD HAVE SEEN ANYONE... *NO!* THEY'RE ALIVE! THEY MUST HAVE DUG THEIR WAY OUT RIGHT AFTER I LEFT! AND THEY'VE BEEN WAITING HERE...

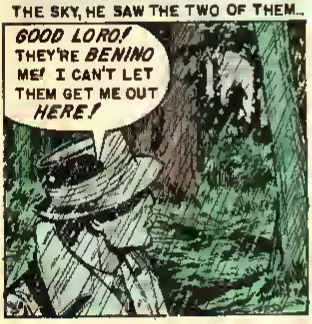
HE HAD DUG INTO HIS COAT, YANKED OUT HIS AUTOMATIC, AND HE REMEMBERED THE COURAGE IT HAD GIVEN HIM! HE TURNED... STARTED BACK TO THE LODGE. IT BEGAN TO RAIN.

SURE! THEY KNEW I HAD TO COME BACK FOR MY CAR, SO THEY WAITED FOR ME! THEY WANT TO GET *EVEN!*

THEY'RE PROBABLY BACK AT THE LODGE NOW! WELL, *THIS* TIME I'LL MAKE *SURE* THEY'RE DEAD!

THE MISTY DRIZZLE HAD GRADUALLY BECOME A HEAVY RAIN... AND AS THE RAIN BECAME MORE INTENSE, HIS BRAVADO FADED! HE TURNED TO LOOK BACK! SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE SKY, HE SAW THE TWO OF THEM...

GOOD LORD! THEY'RE *BEHIND* ME! I CAN'T LET THEM GET ME OUT *HERE!*

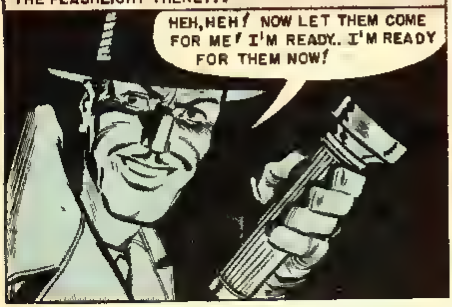


AGAIN THE SHARP PANIC ENGULFED HIM, AND HE RAN! HE WANTED TO REACH THE LODGE...TO MEET THEM WITHOUT THE DISADVANTAGE OF THE TREES AND THE BLASTED RAIN! HE HAD RUN FASTER... FASTER...

THERE HAD BEEN A POWERFUL .38 IN HIS HAND, BUT SOMEHOW IT SEEMED INEFFECTUAL... ALMOST USELESS! HE HAD NO CONCRETE REASONS... BUT HIS MOUNTING FEAR WAS REASON ENOUGH.

HE HAD REACHED THE LODGE CLEARING IN A FIT OF TERROR! HIS STUMBLY LEGS CARRIED HIM WEAKLY TO HIS CAR. HE FLUNG OPEN THE DOOR, SLUMPED TIREDLY ON THE SEAT WHILE HIS TREMBLING HANDS HAD OPENED THE GLOVE COMPARTMENT AND GRABBED THE FLASHLIGHT THERE...

HEH, HEH! NOW LET THEM COME FOR ME! I'M READY.. I'M READY FOR THEM NOW!



HE HAD WALKED SWIFTLY THROUGH THE TALL WET GRASS TO THE LODGE, HAD CLIMBED THE WOODEN STEPS TO THE WOODEN PORCH, HAD OPENED THE WOODEN DOOR AND STEPPED INTO THE WARM, DRY, PITCH-BLACKNESS! HE CLOSED THE DOOR, GROPED HIS WAY ACROSS THE ROOM TO A CORNER... AND WAITED...

HE HAD WAITED AND LISTENED TO THE RAIN WHISPERING TO THE LEAVES AND THE BLADES OF GRASS... UNTIL HE HEARD THE UNMISTAKABLE SHUFFLING, RUSTLING SOUND OF THEIR FOOTSTEPS OUTSIDE...

NOW HE PRESSED BACK DEEPER INTO THE CORNER, TIGHTENED THE GRIP ON HIS .38! THIS WAS IT! ONLY A FEW MORE MINUTES! HE HEARD THEM MOUNTING THE STEPS TO THE PORCH...

HE SWIPED AT THE PERSPIRATION WITH HIS COAT SLEEVE! LONG MINUTES PASSED, AND THEN THE DOOR CREAKED SLOWLY OPEN! AN UNBEARABLE, NAUSEATING STENCH PERVADED THE ROOM...

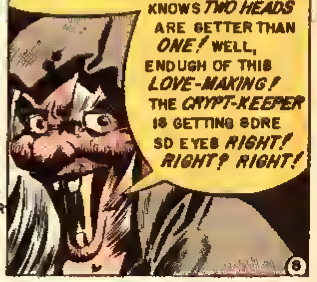
HE GRIPPED HIS AUTOMATIC TIGHTER STILL TO CONTROL THE SHAKING HAND! IN THE INKY BLACKNESS HE HEARD THEIR STEPS MOVING TOWARD HIM ACROSS THE ROOM... CLOSER! *CLOSER!* AND THE HORRIBLE, PUNGENT ODOR GREW STRONGER, GAGGING HIM, AND HIS ENTIRE BODY WAS CONVULSED WITH VIOLENT SHIVERS AND HIS NERVES WERE SPLITTING FROM THE STRAIN...

HE SNAPPED ON THE FLASH-LIGHT!!

IN A SAVAGE, DESPERATE FRENZY, HE RAISED HIS GUN, BLASTED THE MONSTROSITY WITH A STACCATO OF LEAD... SAW THE SHELLS RIP AND TEAR THROUGH, SHATTERING BONE INTO FRAGMENTS, DECAYED, MAGGOTY FLESH INTO SMITHEREENS! BUT IT DIDN'T STOP... IT CAME GROPING TOWARD HIM, CLOSER AND CLOSER...

AND THEN HIS GUN CLATTERED HARMLESSLY TO THE FLOOR AND HE SCREAMED HYSTERICALLY! THE TWO-HEADED ROTTING THING ENVELOPED HIM IN AN EMBRACE OF DEATH AND THE AGONIZING, ALL-CONSUMING FIRES OF DEATH FLOODED HIS BODY! IT WAS THEN, AS HIS LIFE LEFT HIM, THAT HE REMEMBERED IT WAS *HE* WHO HAD PROMISED SHARON AND HER LOVER THEY WOULD BE *TOGETHER FOREVER!*

HEH, HEH! WELL I WISH I COULD TELL YOU *IN DETAIL* JUST WHAT SHARON AND HER LOVER *DID* TO LARRY, BUT AFTER ALL... HOW REVOLTING CAN ONE GET? LARRY SHOULD HAVE KNOWN HE COULD NEVER HAVE WON! *EVERYBODY* KNOWS *TWO HEADS* ARE BETTER THAN *ONE!* WELL, ENOUGH OF THIS *LOVE-MAKING!* THE *CRYPT-KEEPER* IS GETTING SORE SO EYES *RIGHT! RIGHT? RIGHT!*

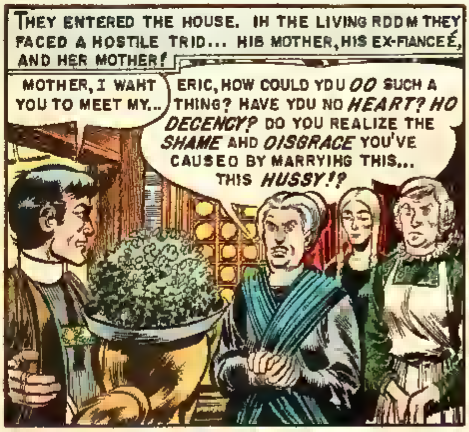


THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! SO NICE OF YOU FOUL FIENDS TO VISIT WITH ME AGAIN! IT'S SO HEARTWARMING TO KNOW THAT I AM NOT ALONE IN MY PLEASURE OF THE HORRORS AND GRUESOME DEEDS THAT ARE FOUND HERE IN THE *CRYPT OF TERROR!* YES, THIS IS *THE CRYPT-KEEPER*, YOUR OLD STAND-BY, BRINGING YOU ANOTHER *DEVILISH* DRAMA OF LIFE'S WICKEDNESS! I CALL THIS LITTLE SWEAT-PROVOKER

WITCH WITCH'S WITCH!

EVERYONE IN THE TINY EUROPEAN VILLAGE OF SLUMSTADT KNEW THEY WERE COMING. A WEEK AGO ERIC HOLBEIN HAD TRAVELED TO THE CITY ON BUSINESS... AND TWO DAYS LATER HAD SENT WORD THAT HE HAD *MARRIED!* IN THE TOWN SQUARE PEOPLE HUDDLED TOGETHER WHISPERING OF THE IGNOBLE MANNER IN WHICH HE HAD TREATED ALICIA GRUENWALD TO WHOM HE HAD BEEN BETROTHED SINCE CHILDHOOD. THE TOWN WAS UTTERLY AGHAST AT THE SCANDAL...

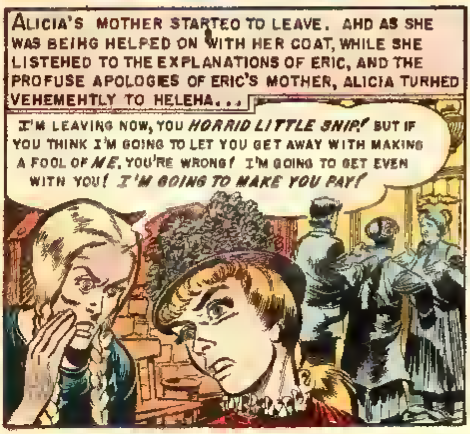

THEY ENTERED THE HOUSE. IH THE LIVING RDDM THEY FACED A HOSTILE TRID... HIS MOTHER, HIS EX-FIANCEÉ, AND HER MOTHER!
MOTHER, I WAHT YOU TO MEET MY...
ERIC, HOW COULD YDU *OO* SUCH A THING? HAVE YDU NO *HEART? HO DECENCY?* DO YOU REALIZE THE *SHAME* AHD *OISGRACE* YOU'VE CAUSED BY MARRYIHG THIS... THIS *HUSSY!?*

BUT MOTHER, LISTEN...
OH, PLEASE! I *BEG* YDU!
EHOUGH! HOW YDU CDULD HAVE CHOSEH THIS *CHEAP, BRAZEH SLUT* WHEN YOU COULD HAVE MARRIED *ALICIA*, IS SEYDHD ME! SURELY, SHE HAS *BEWITCHED* YOU!

HOHSEHSE! I *LOVE* HELENA!
HOW CAH YDU *LOVE* A PERSOH LIKE *HER??* YOU MUST BE DUT OF YOUR MIHD!
WAIT!

ALICIA, ERIC'S EX-FIAHCEÉ, SPOKE...
I... I BEAR YOU HO GRUDGE, ERIC. I DIDN'T WANT TO SE HERE TODAY, BUT MY FATHER INSISTED. IT HURTS ME TO HAVE LOST YDU... BUT I WISH YOU AND HELEHA ALL THE HAPPIHESS I HAD HDPED FDR!
THAHK YDU, ALICIA...

...HELEHA... TAKE GOOD CARE OF ERIC. *LOVE* HIM *ALWAYS*. AHD, IF YOU SHOULD HO LOHGER WANT HIM... I'LL... I'LL BE WAITING! (SOB)
OH, ALICIA, I PROMISE YDU I'LL BE A *GOOD WIFE* TO ERIC! THAHK YOU BEIHG SO UHDERSTANDING!


ALICIA'S MOTHER STARTED TO LEAVE. AHD AS SHE WAS BEIHG HELPED ON WITH HER COAT, WHILE SHE LISTEHED TO THE EXPLANATIONS OF ERIC, AND THE PROFUSE APOLOGIES OF ERIC'S MOTHER, ALICIA TURHED VEHEMEHTLY TO HELEHA...
I'M LEAVING NOW, YOU *HORRID LITTLE SNIP!* BUT IF YOU THINK I'M GOING TO LET YOU GET AWAY WITH MAKING A FOOL OF *ME*, YOU'RE WRONG! I'M GOING TO GET EVEN WITH YOU! *I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU PAY!*

THAT HIGHT, IH THEIR RDOM, HELENA CRIED BITTERLY...
OH, ERIC! I'M SO MISERABLE! THEY *HATE* ME! THEY'RE ALL AGAINST ME! I LOVE YOU, BUT I SHOULD *HEVER* HAVED MARRIED YOU! I SHOULDH'T HAVE COME HERE AT ALL!
THEY'LL GET USED TO IT, HELEHA! JUST WAIT AHD SEE!
2

THE TOWN HUMMED WITH MALICIOUS GOSSIP! EVERYONE KNEW THAT ERIC'S MOTHER WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH HELENA, BUT IT WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING! A WEEK LATER ERIC'S MOTHER SUDDENLY DIED IN GREAT AGONY...

HELENA WAS TOO ILL TO ATTEND THE FUNERAL, BUT THE TOWNSPEOPLE ASSEMBLED THERE IN DROVES...

I HEARD SHE WAS *TOO SICK* TO COME!

PHAH! SHE BROUGHT *DEATH* TO A *WONDERFUL WOMAN!* SHE ISN'T HERE BECAUSE SHE'S JUST A *PAGAN, HEARTLESS* GIRL, IF YOU ASK *ME!*

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, THE RUMORS SPREAD AND GREW MORE INTENSE WITH EACH REPETITION...

YA' MEAN SHE *DELIBERATELY* KILLED ERIC'S MOTHER?!

OF COURSE! BUT THEY CAN'T *PROVE* IT! SHE'S A *MEAN* ONE, SHE IS!

AND ONE MORNING, HER EYES STILL RED FROM TEARS, HELENA WAS VISITED BY MEMBERS OF THE TOWN'S CHURCH GROUP...

OH, IT'S *SO* KIND OF YOU TO VISIT! I...

IF YOU DON'T MIND, THIS IS *NOT* A SOCIAL CALL! WE ARE HERE *ONLY* BECAUSE IT IS OUR DUTY!

YOUR... DUTY?

YES! IN VIEW OF ALL THE SCANDALOUS EVENTS THAT HAVE CENTERED AROUND YOU SINCE YOUR ARRIVAL HERE, WE FEEL THAT WE MUST ASK YOU *NOT* TO ATTEND OUR MEETINGS!

OH, BUT... PLEASE! IF YOU'LL ONLY LISTEN TO *ME!*

THIS IS NOTHING *PERSONAL*, YOU UNDERSTAND, BUT TO INSURE THE *MORAL* CHARACTER OF OUR LITTLE CHILDREN, IT IS A *NECESSITY!* GOOD DAY!

TO HELENA, THE TENDER, COMFORTING WORDS OF HER HUSBAND WERE HER ONLY SOLACE. SHE WAS ALL SO HELPLESS TO STEM THE RISING TIDE OF HATE THAT WAS MUSHROOMING! IT WAS BUT A FEW DAYS LATER THAT THE CHURCH LEADER LAPSED INTO A COMA...

SHE WON'T WAKE UP! SHE SLEEPS LIKE THE *DEAD!*

EVER SINCE ERIC BROUGHT THAT WOMAN HERE, THERE'S BEEN NOTHING BUT TROUBLE! *SHE* CAUSED THIS!

THE UNKNOWN CAUSE OF THE CHURCHWOMAN'S COMA GAVE RISE TO FANTASTIC STORIES BY THE SUPERSTITIOUS... AND ALICIA'S MOTHER EAGERLY DID HER SHARE OF IT...

THERE'S SOMETHING VERY STRANGE AND *EVIL* ABOUT THAT WOMAN, MARK MY WORDS! EVERYONE WHO HAS CROSSED HER PATH HAS SUFFERED *DREADFULLY!* IT'S AS IF AN *EVIL SPIRIT* WERE AT WORK!

THE WAY ERIC IS *BLIND* TO WHAT'S GOING ON, YOU'D BE SURE HE HAD A *SPELL* CAST ON HIM! THAT'S THE ONLY REASON *I* CAN SEE FOR HIS HAVING *MARRIED HER* INSTEAD OF MY POOR, BROKEN-HEARTED ALICIA! AND AS SOON AS SHE CAME HERE... *PDDF!* ERIC'S MOTHER *DIED!*

YES!

YES, THAT'S SO!

...AND THEN THE LEADER OF OUR CHURCH GROUP! YOU *KNOW* WHAT HAPPENED TO *HER!* AND IT WAS RIGHT AFTER SHE VISITED THAT WOMAN! I TELL YOU THAT WOMAN HAS A *STRANGE POWER*.. THE POWER OF *A WITCH!*

A *WITCH?!*

A *WITCH?!*

YES! HOW *ELSE* CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE GOINGS-ON SINCE SHE CAME HERE?! ONLY A *WITCH* CAN CAST *SPELLS!* ONLY SOMEONE WHO CONJURES UP *EVIL SPIRITS* CAN CAUSE PEOPLE TO SLEEP LIKE THE *DEAD!*

A *WITCH!*

LORD 'A MERCY!

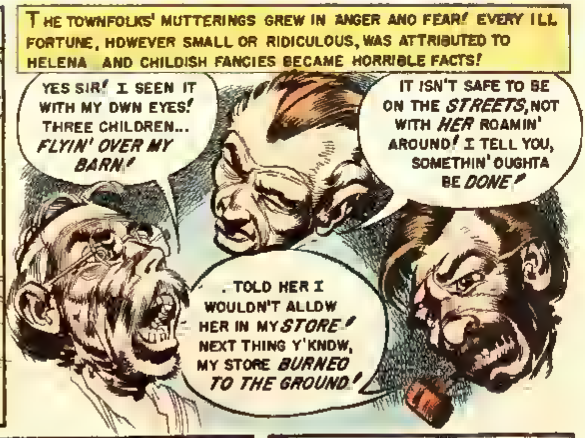
SHE COMMUNES WITH THE DEVIL! BY HEAVEN, THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN I *FEAR* FOR MY *LIFE!*

WE'RE *DOOMED!* A *WITCH* BE AMONG US!

IT WAS BUT A SHORT TIME LATER THAT ALICIA'S MOTHER AND HER TERRIFIED FRIENDS WERE CROSSING THE TOWN SQUARE. SUDDENLY THEY STOPPED, TREMBLING! THEY SAW HELENA STANDING BEFORE A SHOP WINDOW ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SQUARE, AND SUDDENLY SHE TURNED. FOR A MOMENT HER GAZE RESTED ON ALICIA'S MOTHER..

...WHO PROMPTLY STAGGERED AND FELL DEAD!

DEATHLY FRIGHTENED, HELENA RAN SWIFTLY AWAY, THE SHOUTS RINGING IN HER EARS ..
A WITCH! SHE'S THE DEVIL'S OWN!
SHE DID IT! WE SAW HER DO IT! SHE'S A WITCH!!


THE TOWNFOLKS' MUTTERINGS GREW IN ANGER AND FEAR! EVERY ILL FORTUNE, HOWEVER SMALL OR RIDICULOUS, WAS ATTRIBUTED TO HELENA AND CHILDISH FANCIES BECAME HORRIBLE FACTS!
YES SIR! I SEEN IT WITH MY OWN EYES! THREE CHILDREN... FLYIN' OVER MY BARN!
IT ISN'T SAFE TO BE ON THE STREETS, NOT WITH HER ROAMIN' AROUND! I TELL YOU, SOMETHIN' OUGHTA BE DONE!
. TOLD HER I WOULDN'T ALLOW HER IN MY STORE! NEXT THING Y'KNOW, MY STORE BURNED TO THE GROUND!

THE ENTIRE TOWN WAS PRESENT AT THE BURIAL OF ALICIA'S MOTHER! AND AS EVERYONE KNELT IN PRAYER, ALICIA SUDDENLY LOOKED SKYWARD AND SCREAMED!
WHAT'S THE MATTER, CHILD?
I SEE HER! SHE'S COMING FOR ME! SHE WANTS TO KILL ME!

THE WITCH! I SEE THE WITCH!
AAGGH! MY HEART!
GLORY BE! THE WITCH IS TRYING TO KILL HER!

OO SOMETHING! THE PAIN! SHE'S TRYING TO TEAR MY HEART OUT!
AAAAGGH!
OO SOMETHING, YOU IDIOTS! DON'T JUST STAND THERE!

WE GOT TO PUT AN END TO THIS!
KILL THE WITCH!
BURN HER! BURN THE WITCH!

THE FURY OF THE MOB FLARED AND SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE! TORCHES WERE LIT, AND AMID THE SCREAMING FRENZY OF THE MARCHING PEOPLE, SHOUTS WERE HEARD THAT HERALDED HELENA'S DOOM!

AS THE HECTIC MOB DREW CLOSE, HELENA WAS ALMOST HYSTERICAL WITH FEAR...
ERIC! THEY'VE GONE CRAZY! DON'T LET THEM GET ME, ERIC! YOU KNOW I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING! ERIC! OOH'T LET THEM GET ME!
DON'T WORRY, HELENA! I'LL PROTECT YOU!
AND THEN THE MOB CRASHED INTO THE HOUSE, FILLING THE ROOMS, WRECKING FURNITURE, STARTING FIRES, THROWING HER TO THE WALL...
WE HAVE YOU NOW, WITCH! YOU WON'T DO ANY MORE KILLIH'!
HO,HO! PLEASE! I HAVEH'T OOHE AHYTHING! OH, PLEASE BELIEVE ME! ERIC! HELP ME!
GET OUT OF MY HOUSE! GET... UNGH!
BE STILL! CAN'T YOU SEE WHAT SHE'S UP TO, MAN? WHEH THIS IS OVER, YOU'LL THAHK US!
HO! HO!
I HAVEH'T OONE ANYTHING! OH, GOD, MAKE THEM BELIEVE ME! I HAVEH'T OONE ANY-THIHG! PLEASE! PLEASE!
LOOK HERE! WE FOUND THIS OOLL IN THE ATTIC. WITH A PIN IH ITS HEART!
AHHA! NOW WE HAVE PROOF! THIS IS HOW YOU TRIED TO KILL ALICIA! THIS IS WHY SHE WAS SCREAMIH' AHD OYIH'!
HO,HO! YOU'RE ALL WRONG! ALICIA GAVE ERIC THAT DOLL YEARS AGO! IT'S SUPPOSED TO HAVE PINS IN IT! IT'S A PIN-CUSHION!
CAH'T YOU SEE! ALICIA WAS ANGRY BECAUSE I MARRIED ERIC! SHE'S TRYIHG TO GET EVEN! SHE WAS ONLY FAKING! JUST PRETEHOING TO BE OYIHG!
LIAR! KILL THE WITCH! BURN HER!!
ERIC! HELP ME!
KILL HER!
AAAGHH!
BURN HER!
ERIC!
6

PANDEMONIUM RACED THROUGH THE ROOM! IN THE MAD CONFUSION HELENA WAS PUMMELED AND KICKED! SHE SAW ERIC FIGHTING DESPERATELY, HEARD THE DULL BLAST OF A PISTOL! ERIC TUMBLED TO THE FLOOR..

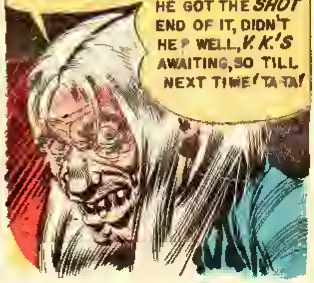
SHE FELT HERSELF DRAGGED, SCREAMING AND CLAWING, TO THE TOWN SQUARE! THE ANGRY ROAR OF THE MOB FLOODED HER EARS AND HER ENTIRE BODY ACHED FROM COUNTLESS BLOWS! FLEETINGLY, SHE SAW THE HUGE FIRE ...

THEN SUDDENLY HER STRENGTH LEFT AND SHE CEASED FIGHTING! SHE LET THEM PLACE HER ON A BARREL FOR THE CROWD TO SEE..

AT SIGHT OF HER, THE HYSTERICAL MOB ROARED EVEN LOUDER! SHE HUNG HER HEAD.. COVERED HER FACE WITH HER HANDS...

AT LENGTH SHE RAISED HER HEAD, GAZED OVER THE BOBBING FACES. SHE LIFTED HER ARMS TO THE SKY...

HEH, HEH! WITCH ALL GOES TO SHOW, YOU CAN'T BE SURE OF NOTHING! YES, HELENA REALLY *WAS* A GENUINE *WITCH*, BUT SHE SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SO *ACTIVE!* CASTING ALL THOSE *SPELLS* NEARLY *SPELLED* HER *DOOM!* HEH! AND POOR ERIC.. HE GOT THE *SHOT* END OF IT, DIDN'T HE? WELL, *V. K.'S* AWAITING, SO TILL NEXT TIME! TA-TA!



COOLER

The drop from the high stone wall jarred Scott right down to his toes, his boots crunched noisily in the snow as he began to run For a hundred yards he zigzagged erratically, to avoid detection, in case he'd been seen. At last he reached a grove of ice-hung trees and stopped to catch his breath He turned quickly, his mittened hands thrashing at his arms and shoulders to keep the circulation moving For a moment his eyes roved from one end of the huge stone wall to the other. from deep in his throat a soft whinny of satisfaction welled up. *Cragmore Prison,* he whispered in triumph. *The rock-pile no one ever busted out of I made it . . . they'll never hustle ME back into that lousy cooler!*

A sudden chill made Scott's body tremble violently He spat once, to show his contempt for Cragmore, then began to crunch across the frozen ground toward the Lake The way he'd figured it, back there in the cooler, this was the best time to try a break-out A little *cold,* perhaps but when else could he cross the Lake which completely surrounded the island on which the prison stood? The first cold snap, he'd been telling himself, and the Lake would freeze over solid The time had come . it must be close to zero right now!

He was crossing the dirty grey ice, warily watching the dark patches which meant water close to the surface, when he heerd the alarm. They'd be searching the Lake for him in another minute, Scott realized not enough time to teach the opposite shore He was cornered, unless unless .

Almost directly in front of him he saw it a jagged hole cut in the thick ice, probably by a farmer doing some illegal fishing Carefully, inch by inch, Scott lowered himself through the hole into the frigid water He heard the first crash of footsteps just as he disappeared completely into the gaping hole and ducked out of sight under the heavy cover of ice shrouding the Lake

It was painfully cold, with water up to his chin and only a few inches of air between the water line and the ice sheet overhead . but it was his only chance Then the crash of feet came closer, right toward him it seemed, and Scott dove deep and paddled frantically to get away from the hole For a full minute he swam blindly underwater, then, when he thought his head would burst from the pressure, he slid upward and drew a deep breath in the tiny corridor of air between the water and the ice Five minutes he waited in silence, listening intently When he was sure his pursuers had gone, he began searching for the hole in the ice, so that he could climb out and get to the opposite shore

He seemed to have lost it completely . the jagged entrance to this watery hideout. He thrashed around in ever more hysterical circles, but the hole had somehow vanished without trace His fists grew raw and bloody from his frenzied attempts to punch a new hole in the ice, but still there was no way out of his freezing prison

Fiery pin-points of pain began to stab at his flesh in a thousand parts of his body, his arms and legs seemed curiously numbed and useless His last scream of horror echoed dully through the narrow corridor of sub-zero air just a second before his brain seemed to explode into a riot of white-cold icicles Then a strange feeling of tranquility took possession of him . for a moment he felt warm and drowsy Though his lips were stiff with frost he managed to smile feebly before he started slowly to slide under the water

They'll never take me back to the cooler, he thought as his body drifted downwards through the freezing water

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION, REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) of VAULT OF HORROR published Bi-monthly at New York, N.Y. for October 1, 1953

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, L.L. Pub. Co. Inc, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y., Editor, John T. Craig, 225 Lafayette St, New York 12, N. Y., Managing Editor, William M. Gaines, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y.; Business manager, Frank D. Lee, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) L.L. Pub. Co. Inc., 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y. Wm. M. Gaines, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y. J. K. Gaines, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner.

5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

(Signed) FRANK D. LEE, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23rd day of September, 1953.

[SEAL] Ettore De Stefano, Notary Public. (My commission expires March 30, 1954.)

YOU, TOO, CAN MEET NEW FRIENDS! JOIN THE

E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB!

SEND FOR *YOUR MEMBERSHIP KIT* TODAY. RECEIVE A FULL-COLOR 7½ X 10½ ILLUMINATED *CERTIFICATE*, A STURDY WALLET *IDENTIFICATION CARD*, A SNAZZY EMBROIDERED *SHOULDER PATCH*, AND A STUNNING ANTIQUE BRONZE-FINISH BAS-RELIEF *PIN*.

* * * * *

FOR AN *INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP*, FILL OUT THE COUPON AND SEND IT IN, TOGETHER WITH 25¢. IF *FIVE* OR *MORE* OF YOU WISH TO JOIN AS AN *AUTHORIZED CHAPTER*, ENCLOSE *EACH* MEMBER'S NAME AND ADDRESS ALONG WITH 25¢ FOR *EACH NAME*, AND INDICATE THE *NAME* OF THE *ELECTED CHAPTER PRESIDENT*. WE WILL NOTIFY *EACH PRESIDENT* OF HIS *CHAPTER NUMBER*. *EACH* MEMBER, *CHAPTER* OR *INDIVIDUAL*, WILL RECEIVE HIS KIT *DIRECTLY*... BY RETURN MAIL?

THE VAULT-KEEPER'S CORNER

Heh, heh! What a laugh! Just saw the proofs of that two page spread on my idiot editor Gaines in the March issue of the new "vest-pocket" size photo mag called TOPS. What's got me snickering is the photo they got of him! What a *fat slob!* Rest of the issue seems entertaining enough though some *real cute pin-ups!*

Well enough of this chit-chat lotta mail

Dear Vault-Keeper,

Ever since the early months of 1950, E.C. publications have been the very best obtainable. This was due to the wonderful writing, editing, and artistry in each and every E.C. mag. And during those four years, all of the editors, artists, and writers have received their share of "publicity" in the mags themselves. Not only in the readers' columns, but in the stories as well. The readers used to be able to write in and vote for their favorite story, which always gave the artists a chance for their names to be mentioned. ALL seem to have shared in the advancing and improvement of E.C. during the four years of "New Trend" mags.

But now let me get to the real point of my letter. There is an artist-writer on your staff who seems to get no credit at all. He writes his own scripts for the leads in the "Vaunt of Horror" and "Crime SuspenStories" in addition to doing his artwork. Of course I'm referring to Johnny Craig. But he seems to be in exactly the same position as he was 4 years ago. Lead story, cover. Lead story, cover. This boy is top-notch, and I hope that in the near future, he'll get the recognition he really deserves.

Bill Spicer
Los Angeles, Calif.

ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! I hope you're satisfied! This crumb Craig is now my EDITOR a demotion if I ever saw one! And now he not only *draws* the cover and lead story but *writes all four!*

I enjoy reading your comics so much that I feel I must write and tell you. In this country it's so hard to get American comics that when I do get one, I prize it highly. I have managed to obtain six of your grand E.C. comics, and I would not sell them for a pound. Will you please get me a pen pal?

Malcolm Biggs
69 Swiss Drive
Ashton Vale, Bristol
England

Ya see how *lucky* you are to be *Americans*, you ungrateful brats? YOU can get all the E.C. mags ya want! Poor Malcolm is STARVED for good literature! Go on [illegible] given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unin[corporated] of each individual member, must be given.) L. L. Wm. M. Gaines, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, a more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or othe

4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary such trustee is acting; also the statements in the tw as to the circumstances and conditions under which the books of the company as trustees, hold stock a owner.

5. The average number of copies of each issue or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 mon tion is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and (Sig

Sworn to and s

[SEAL] [illegible] Notary Public

no other [illegible] horror books except E.C.'s. To quote him "I have tried other horror books, but they irritated my skin. But when I tried yours with the ten day test, I found yours to be THE book for me! Not only high quality paper, but the only one containing 100% chlorophyll! They're the greatest since the invention of the Sears and Robuck catalog." How about that?

Jack Laws
San Antonio, Texas

Ya see? We're the only outfit approved by England, girls, parents and dogs!

I would like to say that your comics are the most entertaining and relaxing comics put out. My Dad used to take all my E.C.'s and burn them, then one day he happened to read one, and now fights with everyone else to get one of the few E.C.'s that are received at our newsstand.

Dave DeChaine
Paso Robles, Calif.

Hmmmmmmmm!

What's all the rhubarb about your E.C. comics? So what if they are the best—must you make a point of it? Cut out all the fuss. Who cares? I'm only 17 now, but I'll probably be reading them when I'm 90.

Vera Bernard
N.Y.C.

Just keep reading them and you won't *live* to be 90!

I picked up a horror comic the other day. (I didn't buy it, just thumbed through it!) to see how it compared with E.C., since they used "SuspenStories" in their title. It had the sorriest art work and plots that I had ever seen. They also copied two of their stories from one of the stories in Haunt of Fear and one in Vault of Horror No. 26. It was even a sorry imitation. I have been saving E.C.'s for 2 years and I know every title perfectly, but one of those imitations fooled me completely because it used almost every word on an E.C. cover! It's a crime!

Larry Hawkins
Midwest City, Okla.

Unfortunately it isn't a crime, Larry! Just unethical!

As the wise Englishman said, "It's better that E.C. than that E. don't C.!"

Art Walker
Binghamton, N.Y.

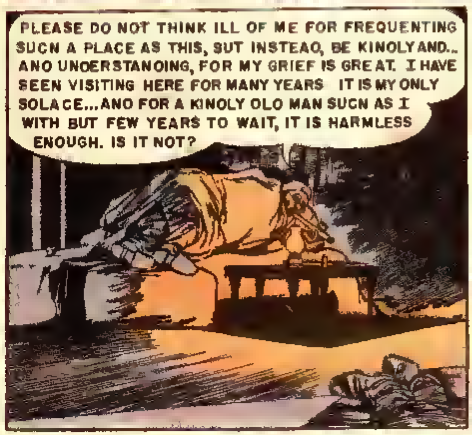
Yea verily!

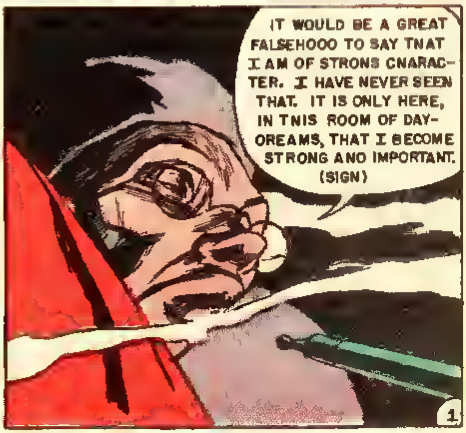
Commercials: WHAT YOU HAVE NOT YET READ E.C.'S TWO 3-D MAGS? YOU HAVE NOT YET READ three dimensional e.c. classics OR three dimensional tales from the crypt of terror? WELL, HERE'S YOUR OPPORTUNITY! Although these priceless gems originally sold on the newsstand for two bits, YOU, by mentioning the code word "money" when you write in, may obtain either for 15c, both for 30c! So rush rush in the money, and we'll rush rush back the 3-D mag(s)! And while you're rushing, rush another buck for a subscription to this rag. Eight issues. In manila envelopes. Address for things like that there:

The Vault-Keeper
Room 706, Dept. Money
225 Lafayette St.
N.Y. 12, N.Y.

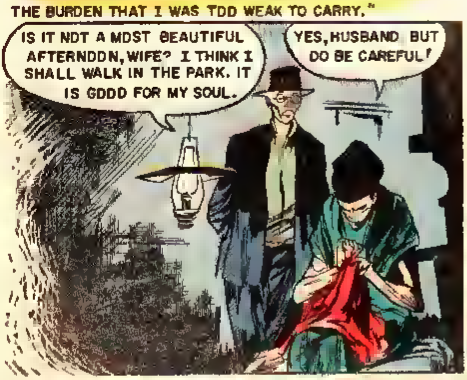
THE DEN WAS QUIET. THE FRAGRANT DDOR OF DPIUM FLOATED TD THE CEILING AND LIKE A HEAVY CURTAIN IT DEADENED THE CHINATDWN STREET NOISES, PUSHED THEM FURTHER AND FURTHER AWAY TO THE REALM OF THE UNREAL... AND THE SMDKERS LAY MOTIONLESS, REVELING IN THEIR OWN FANCIFUL WORLD DF DREAMS. LISTEN NDW AS *CHEN CHU YANG* TELLS YDU HIS STORY IN HIS DWN WDRDS. IT'S ENTITLED...

PIPE-DREAM





"MY STORY GOES BACK PERHAPS A DOZEN SUMMERS. MY WIFE WAS A GOOD WOMAN.. A *STRONG* WOMAN. SHE BORE THE BURDEN THAT I WAS TOO WEAK TO CARRY."



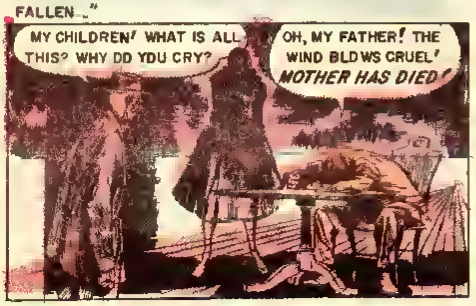
"SUCH A *GOOD* WOMAN. NEVER CAN I RECALL A WORD OF COMPLAINT FROM HER... EVEN THOUGH SHE BUT KNEW IT WAS NOT TO THE PARK I WALKED.. BUT TO THIS HOUSE OF DREAMS. I REMEMBER WELL HOW I CHIDED MYSELF THAT BLACK DAY... UNTIL MY BRAIN WAS LULLED."

"NEVER BEFORE THAT DAY HAD MY DREAMS CONCERNED MY GOOD WIFE. BUT I WAS FILLED TO OVERFLOWING WITH LOVE FOR HER. AND IT WAS BEYOND MY CONTROL.."

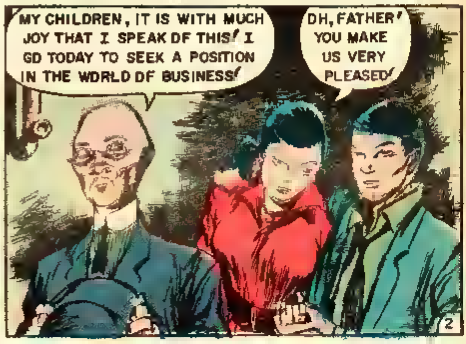
"I DREAMED OF HER WONDROUS FAITH AND DEVOTION TO MYSELF AND OUR CHILDREN ..AND FOR NO REASON, I DREAMED OF THE SADNESS THAT WOULD BE MINE, WERE SHE TO DIE."

"IN GREAT DETAIL I DREAMED THE BIRDS WOULD NOT SING, AND THE FLOWERS WOULD BOW THEIR FRAGRANT HEADS TO JOIN ME IN MY SORROW..."

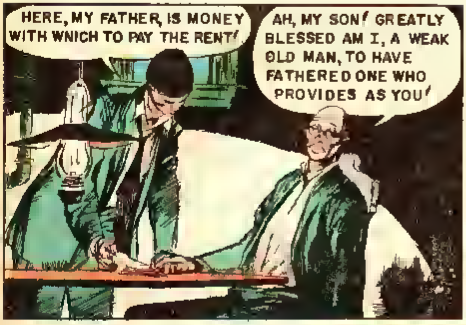
"AI! IT HAD INDEED BEEN A SAD DREAM. BUT IT HAD MADE ME KEENLY AWARE THAT I WAS A FORTUNATE MAN. A *VERY* FORTUNATE MAN TO POSSESS SUCH A TREASURE! AND I HAD RETURNED HOME WITH A LIGHTNESS OF HEART THAT WAS MOST PLEASING. BUT IT PROVED TO BE A BLACK DAY...FOR THE FIRST OF MY GREAT SORROWS HAD FALLEN..."



"HAD I NOT REASON TO GRIEVE? WHAT WAS TO BECOME OF US? I WAS AWARE OF MY DUTY TO MY TWO CHILDREN, OH YES! AND BY THE BEARD OF MY SIRE, I VOWED THAT DAY TO BEGIN ANEW..."

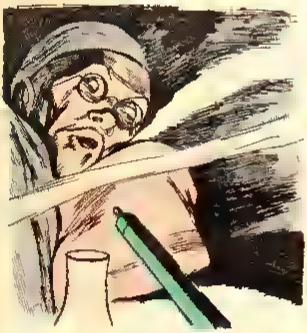


"AN, BUT IT IS SAD. MY SO HONORABLE INTENTIONS FADED LIKE SMOKE BEFORE THE WIND. AND WERE IT NOT FOR THE EFFORTS OF MY SON, WE WOULD NOT HAVE HAD FOOD IN OUR MOUTHS, NOR EVEN A ROOF ABOVE OUR HEADS .."



"BUT AGAIN, MY GLADNESS WAS SHORT-LIVED. THE WAR WAS CALLING FOR MEN... AND MY SON WAS NO EXCEPTION."

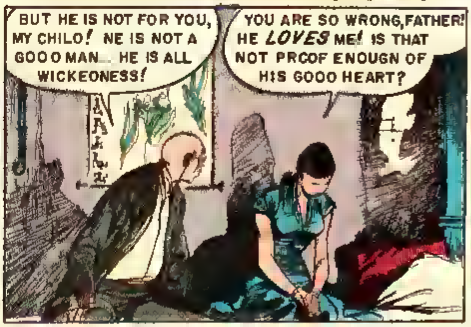
"THAT NIGHT I VISITED THIS PLACE. IN MY HEART I CRIED FOR MY SON WHO WOULD LEAVE US... AND SO DID I CRY IN MY SMOKE DREAMS..."



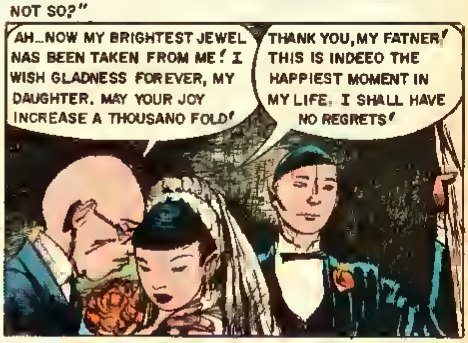
"... AND I DREAMED MY ONLY SON WOULD DIE..."

"(SIGH) THE HOUR WAS LATE WHEN I ARRIVED HOME. I HAD PLEDGED MYSELF TO CARE FOR MY DAUGHTER IN MY SON'S ABSENCE. THIS TIME, SURELY, I WOULD NOT FAIL! YET I WAS GREETED WITH BUT ANOTHER GREAT SORROW..."

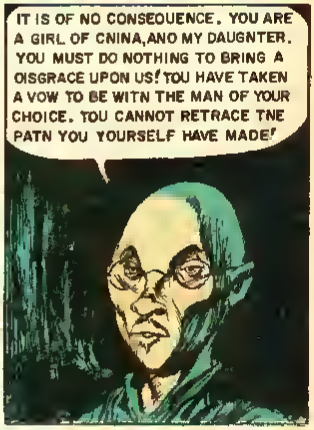
"THE GODS WERE SURELY PUNISHING ME FOR MY LACK OF HONOR! AMENOS WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE BY MY HUMBLE BEING TO ATONE FOR THE MISFORTUNES I HAVE CAUSED. AT ALL COSTS I HAD TO PROTECT AND CHERISH THE WELFARE OF MY TREASURED DAUGHTER..."



"YEA, THOUGH I TRIED WITH ALL MY POWER TO CONVINCE MY DAUGHTER OF HER FOLLY, I WENT UNHEARD.. FOR NO MAN ON THE EARTH CAN SPEAK LOUD ENOUGH FOR A GIRL TO HEAR WHEN HER HEAD IS IN THE CLOUDS. IS IT NOT SO?"



"BUT SHE HAD REGRETS. IN THE SPAN OF SIX MONTHS THERE WERE MANY."



"I HAD WATCHED, TEARS WETTING MY CHEEKS, AS SHE HAD SLOWLY WALKED FROM ME, TO RETURN TO HER MASTER. DID IT NOT SEEM UNFAIR THAT ONE SO YOUNG, SO FAIR, SHOULD SUFFER SO? IT WAS THEN THAT I KNEW I HAD TO ASSERT MYSELF TO RELIEVE MY DAUGHTER OF HER MISERY—"

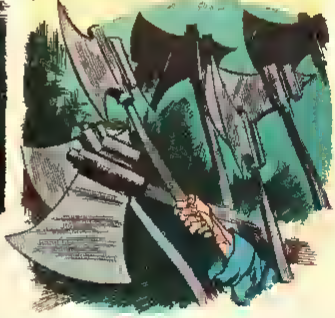
"SURELY *SOMETHING* HAD TO BE DONE! THE GODS HAD GIVEN ME THIS CHANCE SO THAT I MIGHT REDEEM MYSELF! BUT *WHAT* COULD I, A WEAK OLD MAN, DO? IN MY WORRY, I HAD VISITED THIS ROOM OF ENCHANTMENT, AND AS THE AROMATIC VAPORS STUPEFIED MY SENSES, MY IMAGINATION WAS GIVEN ITS FREEDOM..."

"AH, THIS DREAM I WELL REMEMBER. I DREAMED THAT I WAS STRONG AND BRAVE. I DREAMED OF MY DAUGHTER'S SADNESS, OF HER YOUTH THAT WOULD WITHER AS THE AUTUMN LEAF, OF HER TEARS THAT FLOWED LIKE THE RIVER FROM EYES FILLED WITH DISILLUSION..."

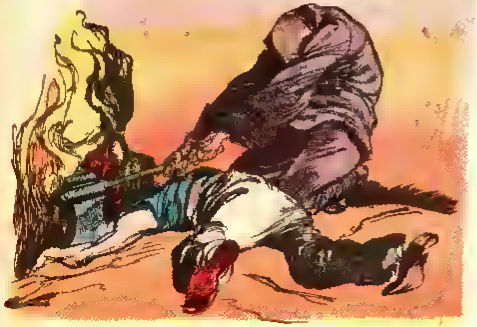
"IN MY DREAM I ARGUED IMPORTANTLY WITH HER MATE. I SAW THE VICIOUS EYES, THE LIPS CURLED IN WRATH, AND I WAS NOT AFRAID..."

"...FOR I HAD THE LION'S HEART! AND WHEN TO HIS SURPRISE, HE SAW HIS WORDS WERE USELESS, WE STRUGGLED MIGHTILY..."

"...AND HIS YOUTHFUL STRENGTH WAS PUT TO ITS GREATEST TEST! IN THE FURY THERE SUDDENLY APPEARED IN MY HAND A HUGE AXE WITH WHICH I STRUCK HIM A HEAVY BLOW..."

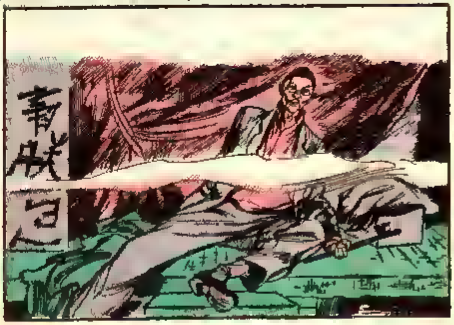


"I SHUDDER NOW TO RECALL HOW HE HAD FALLEN TO THE FLOOR, GUSHING RED, AND HOW I, IN MY ANGER, SMOTE HIM A DOZEN MORE TIMES TILL THERE WAS BUT LITTLE LEFT OF HIM FOR ONE TO VIEW .."



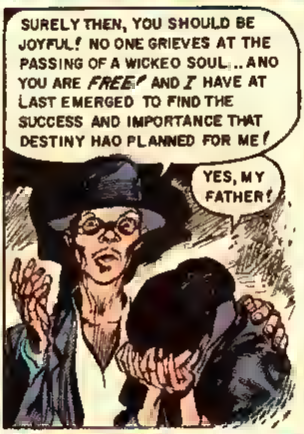
"BEYOND DOUBT, HE WAS DEAD. AND MY HEART REJOICED TO KNOW THAT MY DAUGHTER'S SHACKLES HAD BEEN SEVERED, THAT SHE WAS FREE AS THE STARS THAT ONCE AGAIN SPARKLED LIKE GEMS IN HER EYES! ALL THIS I HAD ACCOMPLISHED... AND I WAS A HERO."

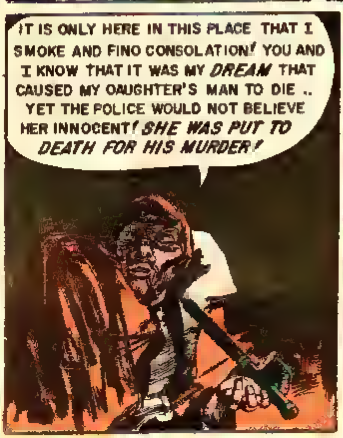
"WHEN I RETURNED FROM THE NEBULOUS WORLD, I WAS GREATLY AGITATED. TO BE SURE, IT WAS AN EXCELLENT DAY-DREAM, BUT SUDDENLY MY TWO GREAT SORROWS OCCURRED TO ME! AND I RECALLED THAT BEFORE THE DEATH OF MY WIFE, I *HAD DREAMED HER DEAD!*"

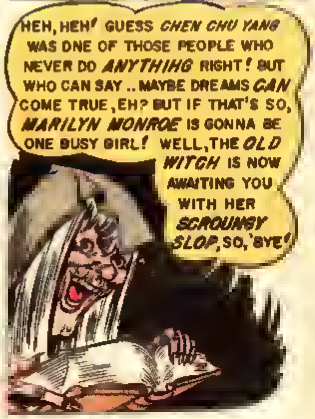


"AND I RECALLED THAT BEFORE THE DEATH OF MY ONLY SON...I HAD DREAMED *HIM* DEAD! COULD MY DREAMS POSSIBLY BE *MORE* THAN MERE FANCIES? COULD THE GREAT GODS WORK IN SUCH A MANNER TO AWAKEN ME TO MY TRUE SELF? YOU CAN EASILY SEE MY EXCITEMENT! I HAD TO KNOW IF I WERE RIGHT! WITH MUCH HASTE I HURRIED TO MY DAUGHTER."

"AND, *LO!* WHEN I ARRIVED, THERE WERE POLICEMEN AND CROWDS ALL BUSTLING AND EXCITED..."







THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE, HEE! WELL, *V.K.* HAS SERVED THE MAIN COURSE, AND NOW YOU SHOULD BE READY FOR THE *DESSERT!* YOUR HUNGRY BELLIES HAVE BECOME *BLOATED*, CONSUMING THE *HORROR* AND *GORE* IN THE PRECEEDING TALES... BUT YET THERE IS ROOM FOR *MORE!* JUST *ONE* MORE TANTALIZING, SCRUMPTOUS TIO-SIT...THE *FROSTING ON THE CAKE*, SO TO SPEAK! AND HERE IT IS, MY FELLOW-GOURMETS, THE STORY CALLED...

TWO-TIMED!

IT WAS SHORTLY AFTER THE TURN OF THE CENTURY...*1900!* THE WOODEN FRAME HOUSE NESTLED COZILY IN THE CENTER OF A MYRIAD OF TREES, QUIETLY SLEEPING UNDER THE WATCHFUL, WINKING STARS.

BUT INSIDE, ON HIS BED, TEN YEAR OLD DICKIE TOSSED RESTLESSLY, STRAINING TO HEAR THE FAMILIAR SOUND.

AND SUDDENLY HE HEARD IT

OOH...THERE! I CAN HEAR THEM NOW! THEY MUST BE COMING HOME AT LAST!

THE CLIP-CLOPPING OF THE HORSE AND BUGGY STOPPED IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE .. AND PUZZLED, HE HEARD IT START UP AGAIN AND MOVE OFF DOWN THE ROAD...

THEIR HOUSE WAS DESOLATELY FAR FROM ANY NEIGHBORS, AND AS HE HUDDLED IN THOUGHT, HE HEARD UNFAMILIAR, ANGRY VOICES FROM OUTSIDE... HE COULDN'T MAKE OUT THE WORDS...

HIS YOUTHFUL CURIOSITY AROUSED, HE LEFT HIS BED, SNEAKED DOWNSTAIRS TO THE PORCH...

QUIETLY, HE INVADED THE SHADOWS OF THE TREES, MOVED CAUTIOUSLY TOWARD THE SHOUTING VOICES...

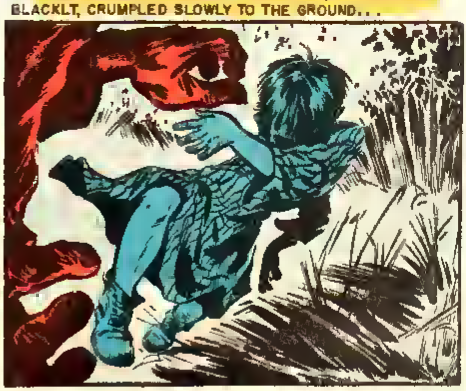
IN THE DIMNESS HE WATCHED THE MAN VICIOUSLY BLUDGEONING THE WOMAN... TOO ENTRANCED BY THE HORROR HE WAS WITNESSING TO CRY OUT...

HE SAW THE WOMAN SLUMP TO THE GROUND, HER SCREAMS TURNING TO MUFFLED, ANGUISHED SOBS. AND THEN WITHOUT REASON, THE MAN SUDDENLY TURNED AND SAW THE BOY...

HE WANTED TO RUN... HE WANTED TO SCREAM FOR HELP, BUT HE COULDN'T! HIS FEET WERE ROOTED TO THE GROUND AS STRONGLY AS THE TREES SURROUNDING HIM! THE MAN WAS ON HIM IN AN INSTANT, HIS POWERFUL HANDS DIGGING GRUFFLY INTO HIS ARMS...

THE MAN'S HANDS SNAPPED CRUELLY AROUND THE BOY'S NECK, EXERTING A TREMENDOUS PRESSURE THAT MADE HIS BLOOD SLAM THROUGH HIS HEAD, FORCED HIS EYES TO BULGE GROTESQUELY FROM THEIR SOCKETS!

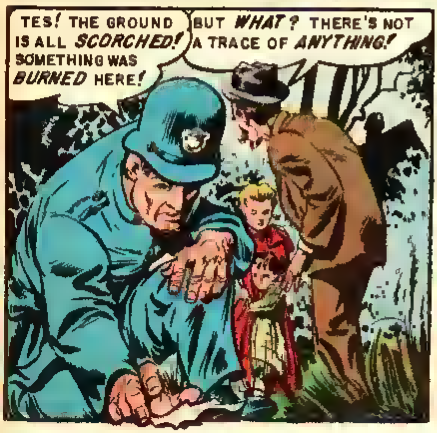
AND AS SUDDENLY AS IT HAD STARTED, IT ENDED! THE MAN RELEASED HIS GRASP, AND THE BOY, MIND SWIRLING BLACKLY, CRUMPLED SLOWLY TO THE GROUND...

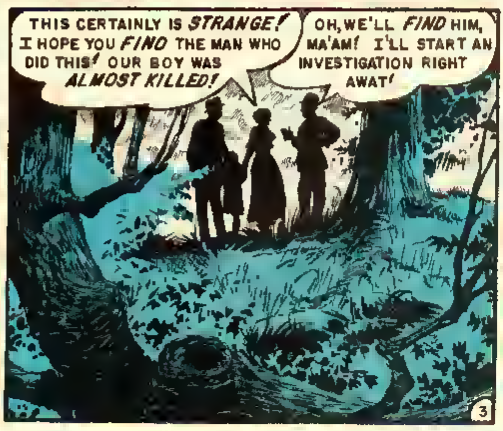


THE BOY REMAINED, SPRAWLED ON THE SOFT EARTH, A THROBBING PAIN IN HIS BRAIN, AND BEFORE HE DROPPED OFF INTO A BLACK VOID HE HEARD THE SHOT!

HE AWOKE TO FIND HIS PARENTS SENDING WORRIEDLY OVER HIM...

HE TOLD THEM AS BEST HE COULD, FRIGHTENED AND TEARFUL, AND THEY LISTENED. WHEN HE HAD FINISHED...





HEE, HEE! WELL, CONSTABLE PHYFE DID IHVESTIGATE, BUT OF COURSE, HE WAS NEVER ABLE TO *SOLVE* THE STRANGE MYSTERY. GRADUALLY IT WAS FORGOTTEN, AND TON MY GREW UP TO MARRY A STINKIN' LITTLE *TWO-TIMER* WHO MADE HIM MISERABLE BY KEEPING A LOVER ON THE SIDE!

ONE NIGHT WHEN HIS WIFE THOUGHT HE WOULD BE WORKING LATE

SURE I WANT TO GET RID OF MY HUSBAND, HONEY! BUT TOU'LL HAVE TO GET ME THE GUN!

WHY THAT CHEAP LITTLE... SHE WANTS TO *KILL* ME!

BUT HIS OWN MURDER WAS ONE THING HE WOULD NEVER ALLOW. SECRETLY HE MADE HIS OWN PLANS TO KILL HER *FIRST!*

LET'S SEE...7 30, LEAVE HOUSE! 8 30, RETURN TO HOUSE! 9:00, GET ALL THINGS IN READIHESS... HMM... YES. YES, I'M ALL SET!

A FEW DAYS LATER HE LEFT ON "AN IMPORTAHT BUSINESS TRIP" TO THE CITY...

I'LL BE HOME IN A FEW DAYS, DANLING! TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF!

BOOD-BYE, DEAR! I'LL MISS YOU!

AS SOON AS HE WAS OUT OF SIGHT, HE HID THE BUGGY IN A CLUMP OF TREES AND DOUBLED BACK TO THE HOUBE JUST IN TIME TO SEE HIS WIFE MEET HER LOVER!

HE'S GONE, SWEETHEART! ISN'T IT WONDERFUL?

TERRIFIC! C'MON, LET'S GO FOR A DRIVE! WE HAVE PLANS TO MAKE, REMEMBER?

HE WATCHED AS THEY SNUGBLED TOGETHER IN THE BUGGY, WAITED TILL THEY HAD DRIVEN OUT OF SIGHT BEFORE HE ENTERED THE HOUSE AND MADE HIS WAY TO THE CELLAR...

THEY PROBABLY WON'T BE BACK FOR A WHILE, BUT I CAN'T TAKE AHY CHANCES! WHERE'S THAT SHOVEL?

HE TOOK A SHOVEL, A LEAD PIPE AHD A CAN OF KERO-SENE FROM THE CELLAR, BROUGHT THEM OUTSIDE AND STASHED THEM DEEP IN THE TREES...

THERE! EVERYTHING'S READY! AS LOHG AS NOTHIHG HAPPENS TO THROW ME OFF SCHEDULE, I'M SAFE! WELL... CAH'T DO ANYTHING NOW EXCEPT WAIT!

SEVERAL HOURS PASSED BEFORE HE HEARD THE BUGGY PULL TO A STOP...

AH! THEY'RE BACK! LOOK AT HER KISS HIM GOOD-NIGHT!

MOMENTS LATER, THE BUGGY RATTLED AWAY AND HIS WIFE BEGAN THE WALK TO THE HOUSE. IT WAS THEN HE STEPPED FROM THE TREES TO CONFRONT HER...

TOM!

YES, IT'S ME, YOU DIRTY DOUBLE-CROSSER!

WHA...? WHAT DO YOU MEAN? I...I THOUGHT...

I KNOW WHAT YOU THOUGHT! YOU THOUGHT I'D STILL BE IN THE CITY!

NO...NO, OF COURSE NOT! I...WHAT ARE YOU DOING? LET GO OF ME!

NOT THIS TIME! I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU PAY FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE!

HE DRAGGED HER, SQUIRMING AND KICKING, BACK THROUGH THE TREES TO WHERE HE HAD BROUGHT THE IMPLEMENTS HE NEEDED TO COMPLETE HIS PLAN...

YOU FILTHY PIG! GET YOUR DIRTY HANDS...

UNGH!

SHE SLUMPED TO THE GROUND! HE SNATCHED UP THE LEAD PIPE, AND IN A DESPERATE FURY POUNDED AND BEAT HER...

CHEAT! LYING TWO-TIMER!

SUDDENLY, WITHOUT REASON, HE TURNED! THERE IN THE DARKNESS HE SAW A BOY, EYES WIDE WITH FRIGHT, IMMOBILE WITH HORROR...WATCHING!

GREAT BLAZES! THE KID SAW EVERYTHING!

IN AN INSTANT HE WAS UPON THE BOY! HIS HANDS SNAPPED CRUELLY AROUND THE SOY'S NECK, EXERTING A TREMENDOUS PRESSURE THAT MADE THE BLOOD SLAM THROUGH THE YOUNGSTER'S HEAD, FORCED THE EYES TO BULGE GROTESQUELY FROM THEIR SOCKETS. . .

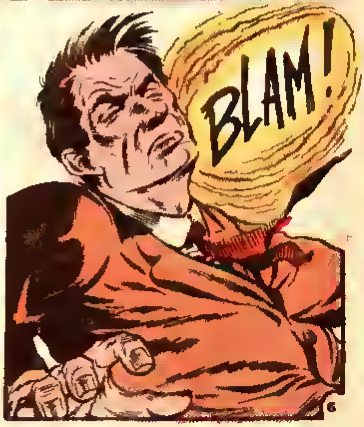
THEN SUDDENLY, A GLIMMER OF REMEMBERANCE AND RECOGNITION FLASHED ACROSS THE MAN'S FACE! HE STOPPED. HIS FINGERS LESSENED THEIR GRIP!

HIS GRASP RELAXED AND THE BOY SLUMPED SLOWLY TO THE GROUND...

SWIFTLY, HE RUSHED TO HIS WIFE, SEARCHED HER POCKETS UNTIL...

HE STUMBLED TO THE KEROSENE, SPILLED IT OVER THE INERT FORM OF HIS WIFE, GLOATING...

CHUCKLING TO HIMSELF, HE STRUCK A MATCH, DROPPED IT ON THE KEROSENE SOAKED BODY! WITH A ROAR OF FLAME IT IGNITED...



HE STAGGERED, THE KEROSENE SLOSHING OVER HIM, AND THEN HE FELL... ON HIS BURNING WIFE'S BODY!

CONSTABLE PHYFE RACED TO THE BLAZING PYRE, FLAILED WILDLY WITH HIS COAT TO SMOTHER THE FLAMES, TO PULL THE BODIES APART

FINALLY THE FLAMES WERE OUT AND THE CONSTABLE SAT CROUCHING BY THE CHARRED, DYING MAN...

LEASTWISE, I KNOW NOW WHY WE ALL SMELLED SMOKE FIFTEEN YEARS AGO! ALWAYS *FELT* THERE WAS SOMETHING MIGHTY CURIOUS 'BOUT THAT STORY YOU TOLD US THEN!

I NEVER WAS *CERTAIN*, MIND YOU, AND THROUGH THE YEARS I KINDA FORGOT ABOUT IT UNTIL TONIGHT! SO I FIGURED I'D BEST GET OVER HERE... JUST TO MAKE SURE!

BUT... (GASP) I DIDN'T KNOW—EITHER UNTIL TONIGHT (GASP) HOW... HOW DID YOU...?

WELL... IT ALL STARTED WITH A SCRAP OF PAPER! JUST A SCRAP THAT I HAPPENED TO FIND BY YOUR BODY THAT NIGHT FIFTEEN YEARS AGO! IT GOT ME TO WONDERING... *BECAUSE IT HAD TODAY'S DATE ON IT!*

THE END

HEE, HEE! DON'T ASK *ME! YOU* FIGURE IT OUT! POOR TOM THOUGHT HE COULD CHANGE THE COURSE OF *DESTINY*, BUT HE FOUND OUT THE HARD WAY THAT YOU CAN'T *FOUL THE FICKLE FINGER OF FATE!* ANYWAY, UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN IN *MY* MAG, *THE HAUNT OF FEAR*, THIS IS *THE OLD WITCH* SAYING 'BYE. DON'T FORGET TO KEEP YOUR *SPIRITS* UP!

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